

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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P R 261315Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4714

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 1237

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINS, CB

SUBJECT: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ENEMY BOMBARDMENT
OF PHNOM PENH

1. SUMMARY: THE INCREASINGLY HEAVY ROCKET AND ARTILLERY
ATTACKS ON PHNOM PENH HAVE CERTAINLY HEIGHTENED FEAR
AND WAR WEARINESS IN ALL SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION.
THEY HAVE NOT CAUSED THE PANIC THE ENEMY APPARENTLY
HOPES TO CREATE, HOWEVER, AND THEY HAVE IN SOME
RESPECTS STRENGTHENED THE GOVERNMENT'S HAND IN OVER-
COMING INTERNAL POLITICAL DISSENT. END SUMMARY

2. BETWEEN DECEMBER 23 WHEN DAILY ROCKETING BEGAN
AND 1900 HOURS JANUARY 26, 67 122MM ROCKETS, 157 105MM SHELLS
AND 51 ROCKETS AND SHELLS OF LESSER CALIBRE HAVE FALLEN
ON PHNOM PENH AND POCHENTONG. THESE HAVE KILLED 92
PERSONS AND WOUNDED 215, OF WHICH WELL OVER 90 PERCENT WERE
CIVILIANS. JUDGING FROM THE NATURE OF THE ATTACKS AS WELL AS FROM
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GRUNK'S PROPAGANDA, THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE OF THE

ENEMY'S INDISCRIMINATE ROCKETING AND SHELLING OF PHNOM PENH IS TO SEED PANIC AND DEFEATISM AMONG THE GENERAL POPULATION AND TO HELP ALIENATE THE POLITICALLY ACTIVE ELEMENTS FROM A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS INCREASINGLY UNABLE TO PROTECT THEM. WHILE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CONTINUED ATTACKS OF THIS SORT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO PREDICT, WE BELIEVE THAT THE ENEMY IS AT THIS TIME STILL FAR FROM REALIZING HIS AIMS.

3. THE EUROPEAN AND KHMER ELITE ELEMENTS IN PHNOM PENH HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN SHAKEN BY THE ATTACKS. THE ROCKETS HAVE TENDED TO FALL IN THE OLD NORTHERN PORTION OF THE CITY WHERE MANY FRENCH GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND EUROPEAN BUSINESSMEN HAVE THEIR HOMES WHILE THE 105 MM SHELLS HAVE BEEN CONCENTRATED IN THE SOUTH NEAR THE NEW CHAMCAR MON SUBURB WHERE MANY DIPLOMATS AND PROMINENT KHMER LIVE. THE SHELLING OF POCHENTONG AIR BASE, WHICH RESULTED IN THE CANCELLATION OF AN AIR FRANCE AND A UTA FLIGHT THIS WEEK, ALSO CAUSES CONCERN AMONG THIS RELATIVELY SMALL SEGMENT OF THE SOCIETY WHICH HAS THE MEANS AND PROBABLY THE INTENTION OF DEPARTING SHOULD THE END APPEAR NEAR. AS DURING THE LAST DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE, RUMORS OF THE IMPENDING FLIGHT OF THE FAMILIES OF PROMINENT CIVIL AND MILITARY LEADERS ARE GOING THE ROUNDS BUT CONFIRMED DEPARTURES ARE FEW. WELL OFF KHMER ARE APPARENTLY ATTEMPTING TO MOVE MORE OF THEIR CHILDREN ABROAD FOR THEIR EDUCATION, USING AS JUSTIFICATION THE CLOSING OF PHNOM PENH SCHOOLS, BUT A GENERAL EXODUS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE IN THE MAKING. FOREIGN PRESS REPORTS OF PANIC IN THE FRENCH AND DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITIES ARE LIKEWISE EXAGGERATED AND MOST OF THOSE FOREIGN NATIONALS WHO HAVE LEFT DO NOT PLAN TO REMAIN GONE FOR LONG.

4. THE MOOD OF THE LESS ADVANTAGED SEGMENTS OF THE PHNOM PENH POPULATION SEEMS TO BE PREDOMINANTLY ONE OF WEARY RESIGNATION. WHILE NO ONE CAN REALLY GET ACCUSTOMED TO EXPLODING ROCKETS AND SHELLS, THE POPULATION OF PHNOM PENH HAS HAD SO MANY OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS AS TO MAKE ACTUAL PANIC A RARE PHENOMENON. THEY HAVE ALSO BEEN TREATED ON SEVERAL PAST OCCASIONS TO ENEMY GROUND

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INCURSIONS NEAR AND EVEN INTO THE CITY AND ARE THUS NOT EASILY PERSUADED THAT THE CITY IS IN DANGER OF SUFFOCATION OR CAPTURE. THE RESOUNDING NOISE OF OUTGOING ARTILLERY AND KAF AIR ATTACKS ALSO WORKS AGAINST ACCEPTANCE OF THE ENEMY CLAIM THAT PHNOM PENH IS NEAR COLLAPSE. WHAT IMPACT THE DESTRUCTIVE ROCKET AND ARTILLERY ATTACKS HAVE HAD ON POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT AND TOWARD THE ENEMY IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR

US TO MEASURE BUT WE WOULD SURMISE THAT THE NET EFFECT UP TO THIS TIME IS NOT SIGNIFICANT. WE HAVE NOT NOTED AN INCREASE IN ANGER TOWARDS EITHER.

5. THE ATTACKS BY FIRE HAVE CERTAINLY INCREASED THE WAR WEARINESS WHICH UNDERLIES THE APPEAL OF RECENTLY ACTIVE "THIRD FORCE" AND LEFTIST ELEMENTS AND, IF THEY CONTINUE, MAY SPAWN MORE MISGUIDED PEACE INITIATIVES. THEY HAVE, ON THE OTHER HAND ALSO STRENGTHENED FOR THE MOMENT THE GOVERNMENT'S HAND IN DEALING WITH DISSIDENCE. THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO PROTEST THE CLOSING OF SCHOOLS AND NOW THE 7 P. M. CURFEW, BOTH OF WHICH RESTRICT THEIR ABILITY TO ORGANIZE LARGE SCALE ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION BUT ARE PERFECTLY JUSTIFIED AS LONG AS ENEMY ROCKETING DURING THE DAY AND SHELLING AT NIGHT CONTINUE. THE PROSPECTIVE BANNING OF PUBLIC GATHERINGS AND ARREST OF LEFTIST STUDENT ACTIVISTS, WHILE SOMEWHAT MORE DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY, WILL NEVERTHELESS BE EASIER TO PUT ACROSS NOW THAN BEFORE THE INCREASE IN ENEMY INDIRECT FIRE ATTACKS.

6. IN SUM, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE ENEMY'S ARTILLERY AND ROCKET ATTACKS IS NOT WHAT HE HOPED TO ATTAIN AND PROBABLY WILL NOT COMPENSATE THE CENSURE SUCH INHUMAN TACTICS ARE LIKELY TO INCUR HERE AND ABROAD. SHOULD THE ENEMY BE ABLE TO CONTINUE, REFINE OR INTENSIFY THE ATTACKS TO THE POINT THAT KEY MILITARY OBJECTIVES (POCHENTONG, THE AMMUNITION DUMPS, ELECTRICAL AND WATER PLANTS, ETC.) ARE BADLY DAMAGED, THE EFFECT WILL, OF COURSE, BE MUCH MORE SERIOUS. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT FANK CAN AND SHOULD STOP THEM SHORT OF THIS POINT.

ENDERS

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